

by

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THE ELEPHANTA CAVE

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the Destroyer. This cave is for the worship of Lord Shiva. The entrance is from the north. Inside are carved panels featuring Shiva with his consort Parvati and other subsidiary figures as Vishnu riding his half-animal half-bird vehicle Garuda; Brahma on a lotus seat supported by swans; the

two sons of Shiva – Kumara the War God and the elephant-headed Ganesha, the God of Prudence and Wisdom; Varuna the God of Waters on his crocodile; Indra riding his elephant Airavata; the skeleton Bhingri, a devotee always at the feet of Shiva; Nandi the bull, the vehicle of Shiva; male and female attendants; door-keepers (dwarapalas) on pilasters on either side of the panels; flying heavenly beings the gandharvas, apsaras, and male and female dwarfs.

In the cave are 9 panels and the central 'lingam' shrine. The visitor first walks in past the double line of pillars to the main panel, the three headed God Trimurthi. He then walks back to the entrance and moves anti-clockwise to see the other 8 panels – The Dancing Shiva, The Killing of the Giant, Marriage of Shiva and Parvati, The Descent of the Ganges, The Half-man half-woman figure, Seated Shiva and Parvati, The imprisonment of Ravana and Shiva as the Divine Yogi.

THE THREE HEADED SCULPTURE: MAHESHA-MURTI : TRIMURTHI

This magnificent sculpture
18 feet high with each head
nearly 6 feet in length carved out
of the living rock depicts the
three aspects of the Divine God;
with Siva; the central figure as
the Creator, Siva; as the Preserver
and Shiva as the Destroyer.

The central figure is calm and serene with an intricate head-dress befitting the Creator. On the spectator's right is Siva, the Preserver, with an almost effeminate face and a crown of soft curls. I his right hand he holds up one of his emblems, t lotus flower. On the spectator's left is Shiva, dominating figure. As the Destroyer, he is grim and ste expression. He has a moustache and tusks protrude down from the corner of his mouth. His symbol the cobra sta in the face. On either side of the panel is a pilaster dwarapala or door-keeper accompanied by dwarf a



THE DANCING SHIVA: NATARAJA: NRITTA-MURTI

This panel, the first on the right as one enters the cave, is badly disfigured. It is an eight armed figure showing Shiva dancing as he is also the Lord of the Dance. This is a Tandava dance, a dance of joy. The God is smiling his left eye-brow raised with an air of sensuality and a feeling of complete detachment. The body is twisted in the famous three angled posture (tribhanga). The right back hand clasps an axe with a coiled cobra while the left holds up a garment. Both legs are broken.

On the left of Shiva is Parvati. To the far right is Kumara, the elephant headed Ganesha and a seated musician. Others in the panel are Brahma on his lotus seat, Vishnu on Garuda, Indra riding his elephant and the flying heavenly hosts.



THE KILLING OF THE GIANT ANDHAKASURA-VADHA-MURTI

This panel shows the Lord Shiva killing Andhaka, the king of the giants (Asuras). The eight armed God is seen triumphantly slaying the demon. The middle right hand holds up a sword and with his left hands he displays the shrunken body of the demon, a bowl to collect his blood and a bell to ring at the fatal moment. Both his legs are broken.

Shiva's face expresses extreme anger, his eyes bulging with rage. He is adorned with jewellery and a head-dress with a skull in the centre.

Above can be seen an object of worship supported by two dwarfs and flying figures doing obeisance.



MARRIAGE OF SHIVA AND PARVATI
KALYANA-SUNDARA-MURTI

This panel represents the marriage of Shiva and Parvati. Parvati is on Shiva's right, a position she occupies in the marriage scene. She is a figure of shyness and innocence, bedecked and jewelled for the happy moment. Shiva is the confident, smiling God protectively holding his beloved's hand. He wears a girdle and his left hand rests on the knot of his robe.

Of the other figures the keen observer can recognise Parvati's father, Himalaya, giving his daughter away in marriage, a mutilated three-faced Brahma as the priest, behind him is Vishnu with a cylindrical cap and the heavenly hosts above forming a halo round the happy couple.



THE DESCENT OF THE GANGES: GANGADHARA-MURTI

The panel depicts the descent of the river Ganges from heaven to earth and its fall being broken on the head of Shiva. He caught the river Ganges with its two tributaries, the Jumna and Saraswati in his matted hair and tamed them.

This panel shows Shiva 'mild and tranquil in appearance' with the three-headed figure on his head illustrating the conjunction of the Ganga, Jumna and Saraswati. Of his eight hands only two on his right remain intact, one is holding up an object while the other is in the abhaya mudra (reassurance) pose.

Parvati on Shiva's left is the image of a floating dancer, her body rhythmically swaying away from his, as she is jealous of another woman in Shiva's hair.

The other figures are a male dwarf between Shiva and Parvati, a female dwarf to Parvati's left, Vishnu on Garuda, Brahma, Indra, and a kneeling figure (Bhagiratha) beautifully executed with a rosette on his head and curls of hair falling on his shoulder.



THE HALF-MAN HALF-WOMAN PANEL · ARDHA-NARISVARA-MURTI

This sculpture signifies the ultimate union between the male and female in the same body. On the spectator's right is the female with feminine characteristics of a full body and large hips. In one hand is a mirror. Her jewellery is exquisite specially her earrings, bracelets and lovely jewels falling along the hair line.

The masculine figure on the left radiates strength, casually leans with one hand on Nandi the bull and holds a cobra in the other. His half of the crown is of matted coarse hair.

Of the other figures one can observe Vishnu riding his bewigged Garuda, Brahma on a lotus seat carried by swans, Varuna the God of the Waters on his crocodile, Indra on his elephant Airavata and the flying heavenly spirits above.



SEATED SHIVA AND PARVATI: UMA-MAHESVARA-MURTI

This panel is badly mutilated and is undecipherable. It shows Shiva and Parvati seated side by side on a ledge. Shiva is leaning towards Parvati and she is moving away—a scene reminiscent of a lovers' quarrel. Parvati is flanked by her female attendants, one carrying a child. Also recognisable are Nandi the bull, bewigged Garuda, Ganesha, dwarfs and the skeleton Bhingri.



THE IMPRISONMENT OF RAVANA: RAVANANUGRAHA-MURTI

Ravana the demon king of Ceylon of 10 heads and 20 arms is at war with Lord Shiva and this panel shows him kneeling under Mount Kailasa, the abode of the Gods, endeavouring to shake the mountain. This alarms Parvati who clings to Shiva for protection. Shiva the Supreme God calmly presses his right toe thereby imprisoning Ravana.

Near Shiva's feet is the skeleton Bhingri, next to him Ganesha, Vishnu on Garuda and above are the flying attendants. On either side of the panel stand guardian-like figures.

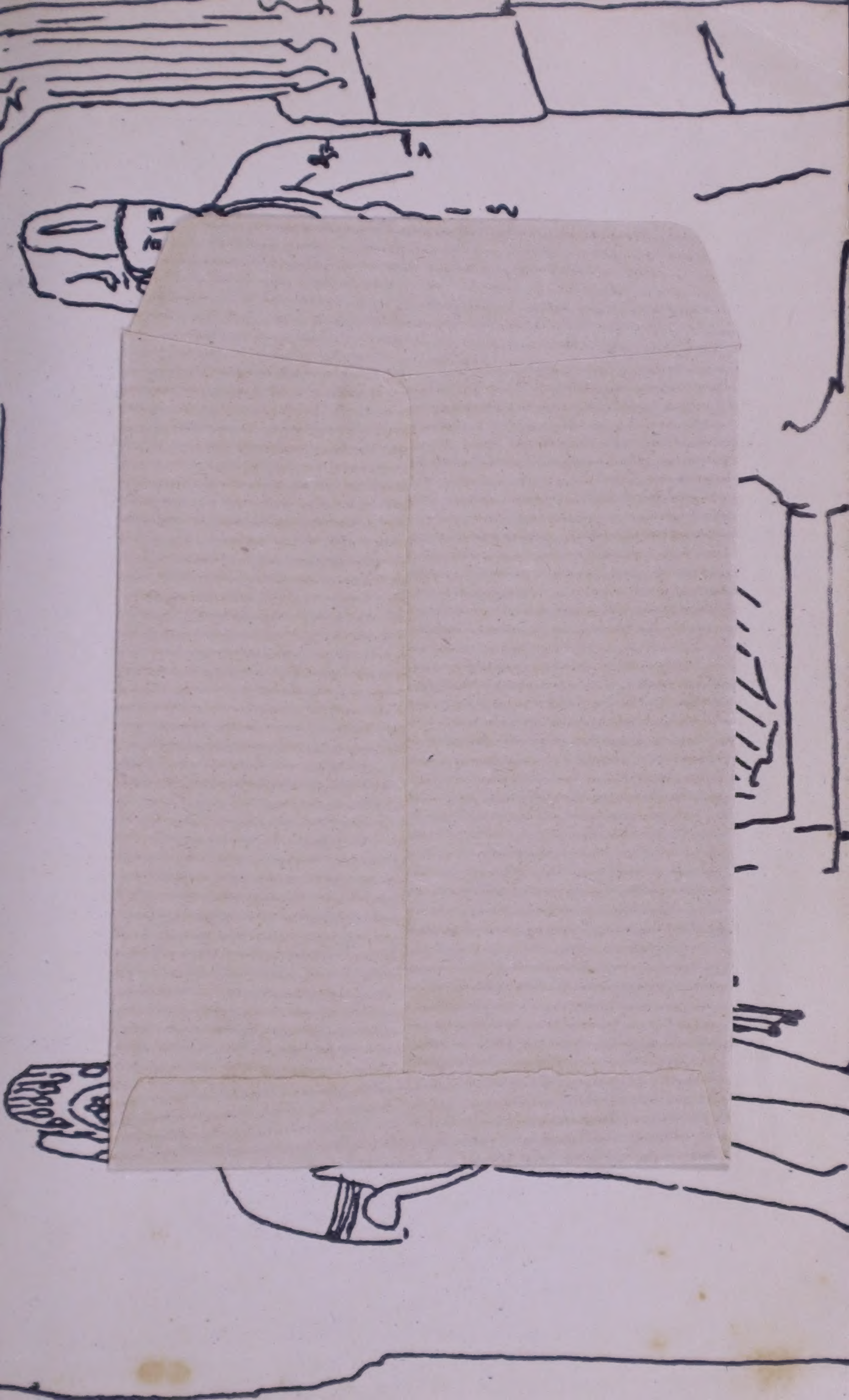


SHIVA THE DIVINE YOGI: SHIVA YOGI-SWARA: MAHAYOGI

This panel is the first on the left as one enters the cave directly opposite the Dancing Shiva. It is badly mutilated and is supposed to represent Shiva as the Divine Yogi. His arms and legs are completely destroyed. Shiva's face reflects deep meditation. He is crowned with an elaborate head-dress with the long hair at the back falling on his shoulders close to his ear-rings and the chain round his neck.

Other figures barely recognisable are Vishnu on his vehicle, the bewigged Garuda, Brahma on a lotus seat supported by swans, Indra riding the elephant Airavata and a tree to Shiva's left.





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